

Hand Washing & Glove Use for Food Workers

What is the main reason for washing hands and not touching ready-to-eat food with bare hands?

The main reason for not touching ready-to-eat foods with bare hands is to prevent viruses and bacteria, which are present in your body from contaminating the food. Viruses and bacteria are invisible to the naked eye, but may be present on your hands if you do not wash them thoroughly, particularly after using the bathroom. The law prohibits bare hand contact with ready-to-eat foods and requires good hand washing by food service workers.

When am I required to wash my hands?

- before starting work;
- before putting on single service gloves;
- after touching raw, fresh or frozen beef, poultry, fish or meat;
- after mopping, sweeping, removing garbage or using the telephone;
- after using the bathroom;
- after smoking, eating, sneezing or drinking;
- after touching anything that might result in contamination of hands.

What is good hand washing?

All employees involved with food preparation must wash their hands and exposed portions of their arms with soap and water. Thorough hand washing is done by vigorously rubbing together the surfaces of lathered hands and arms for at least 20 seconds followed by a thorough rinse with clean water. Use a single-service towel or hot air dryer to dry hands. No special soaps are needed.

Am I required to wear disposable sanitary gloves?

State law does not require gloves to be worn, but does require that ready-to-eat food be prepared and served without bare hand contact. Wearing disposable sanitary gloves is one of several acceptable ways to comply with this law.

How can I prepare or serve ready-to-eat food avoiding contact with my bare hands?

You may use any of the following to prepare or serve foods without bare hand contact:

- tongs;
- forks & spoons;
- deli paper;
- disposable gloves;
- waxed paper;

- napkins;
- spatulas.

What kinds of foods may not be touched with bare hands?

- prepared fresh fruits and vegetables served raw;
- salads and salad ingredients;
- cold meats and sandwiches;
- bread, toast, rolls and baked goods;
- garnishes such as lettuce, parsley, lemon wedges, potato chips or pickles on plates;
- fruit or vegetables for mixed drinks;
- ice served to the customer;
- any food that will not be thoroughly cooked or reheated after it is prepared.

What can I do with a ready-to-eat food item if it was touched with bare hands?

You can either heat the food thoroughly to the temperature required for cooking or reheating, or discard the food, if it was touched with bare hands.

Must I change my gloves after touching money with gloves on?

No. Food outbreak investigations have not identified the handling of money as a cause of illness. But it is a good idea to change your gloves and wash your hands between touching money and preparing food. Many patrons complain to the local health department if they see food workers using the same gloves to prepare food and handle money.

Is a short order cook required to wear gloves?

The short order cook may not touch ready-to-eat foods with bare hands. Disposable gloves are one possible way to prevent bare hand contact with ready-to-eat foods. Another way is to use forks, tongs or spatulas.

When do I have to replace or change gloves?

Always change gloves if the gloves get ripped, torn, or contaminated. Contamination can occur after using the bathroom, smoking, coughing, sneezing, and in between preparing raw and cooked foods. Food worker hands must be washed thoroughly and be cleaned before wearing new gloves.

Where can I learn more about hand washing and glove use?

Your local health department can answer your questions or give you more information about hand washing and glove use and about the importance of glove use in preventing illnesses.